Evaluation of Pre-Arrival Settlement Services

Executive Summary

Research and Evaluation

Evaluation Division

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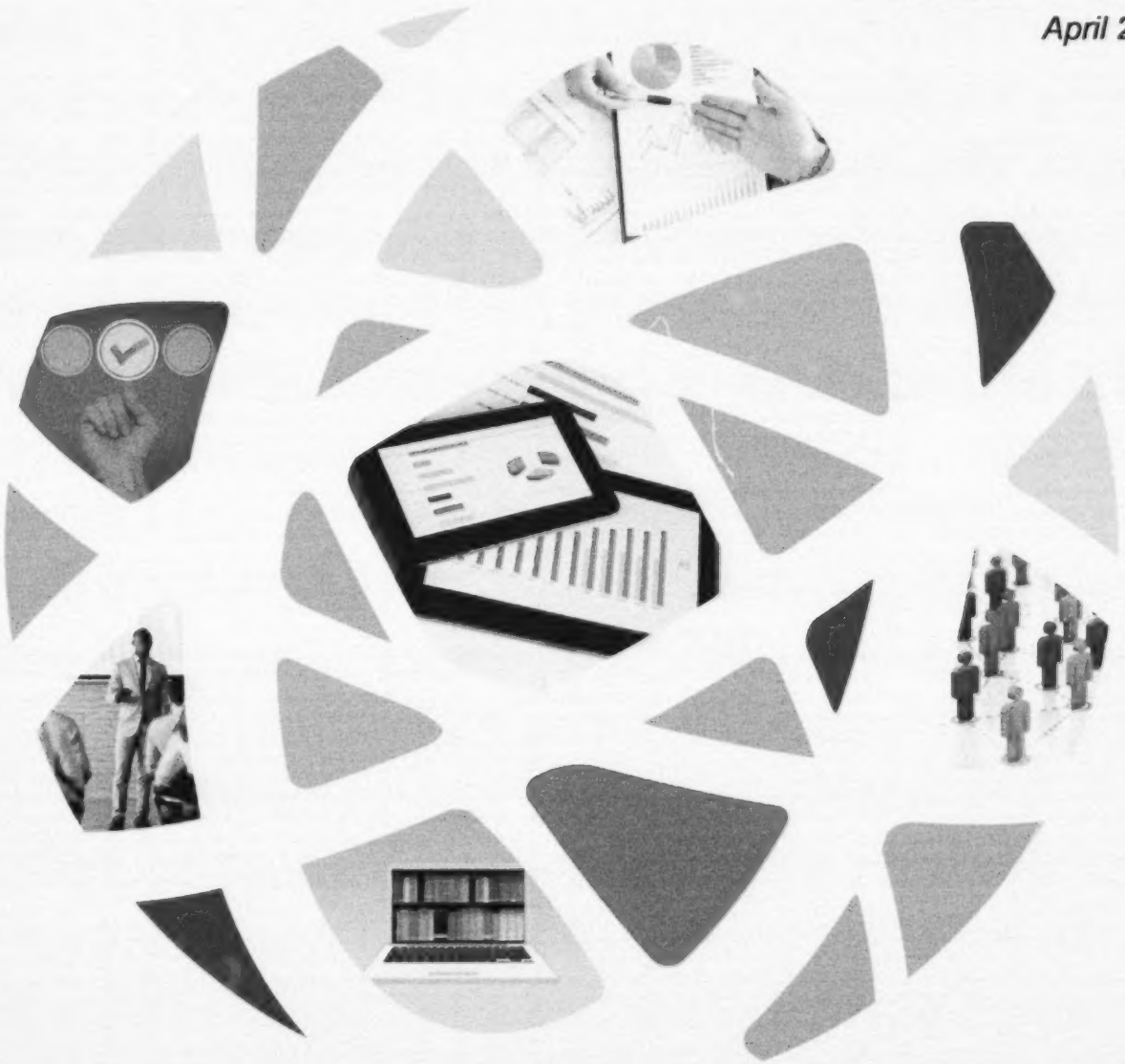

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Purpose of the Evaluation:

This report presents the findings of the evaluation of Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada's (IRCC) Pre-Arrival Settlement Services. The evaluation was conducted to inform future program improvements and in fulfillment of requirements under the Treasury Board *Policy on Results* and section 42.1 of the *Financial Administration Act* and covered the period of fiscal (FY) years 2015/16 - 2017/18.

Overview of Pre-Arrival Settlement Services:

The objective of IRCC's pre-arrival services is to provide selected Permanent Residents,[1] including refugees, with accurate, relevant information and supports so that they can make informed decisions about their new life in Canada and begin the settlement process (including preparation for employment) while overseas. It is expected that these services will enable clients to be better prepared upon arrival to Canada to settle and integrate into Canadian society.

Pre-arrival services provide the same types of services as IRCC-funded in-Canada Settlement services, with the exceptions of Language Assessments and Language Training. Through contribution agreements, IRCC funds service provider organizations (SPOs) such as immigrant-serving agencies, industry/employment-specific organizations or educational institutions to provide the following types of pre-arrival services: Needs Assessments and Referrals, Information and Orientation, Employment-Related Services and Community Connections.

Pre-arrival services vary considerably in scope, delivery models and size (e.g., project funding and number of clients targeted). Some focus on providing information and supports to specific immigration categories or sub-sets of newcomers, some target specific sectors or professions while others only support newcomers destined to certain provinces. Most service providers offer services via web-based platforms while a few provide in-person services.

Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations:

Pre-arrival services are needed and useful, as they help newcomers prepare for their settlement before they depart for Canada.

One of the primary expected outcomes from pre-arrival services is to provide relevant information and supports so that newcomers can make informed decisions about their new life in Canada and begin the settlement process before arriving. In this regard, all client groups found pre-arrival services to be useful and participants are gaining knowledge of life in Canada and the Canadian labour market at a higher rate than non-clients. For example, a greater share of pre-arrival clients (compared to non-clients) indicated having enough information on how to contact organizations that provide help in settling in Canada, how to have professional credentials and/or qualifications recognized, and to understand Canadian workplace culture and norms. Many pre-arrival clients are also taking actions as a result of pre-arrival services, such as looking for work, changing what they bring to Canada and deciding to further training/education to upgrade their skills. Finally, pre-arrival services have also been effective at providing referrals and linking clients with in-Canada settlement services, and these clients have been accessing IRCC-funded settlement services in Canada at a higher rate than non-users of pre-arrival services.

[1] Individuals who have received a Positive Eligibility Decision on their Application for Permanent Residence. Temporary residents and permanent residents already in Canada are not eligible to receive pre-arrival services.

While clients find pre-arrival services useful, the majority of newcomers are not aware of their existence and uptake remains low for non-refugee immigrants. Ineffective promotion of these services, coupled with the absence of a comprehensive strategy to guide pre-arrival service expansion and a lack of clarity within IRCC regarding roles and responsibilities for the program delivery has resulted in a missed opportunity for the Department to positively impact more newcomers, and also in higher than expected per client costs.

Some areas for program improvements have been identified, and as such, this evaluation report proposes the following recommendations.

Framework and guidance: While there is a need to provide a mix of different services, the approach to service expansion has lacked a clearly defined strategy or framework, including a definition of how the various services were expected to be delivered, to complement one another and align with in-Canada settlement services.

Recommendation 1: IRCC should develop a comprehensive program framework and guidance for pre-arrival services that provides a clear strategic direction for program delivery. This framework should:

- Articulate the vision for IRCC pre-arrival services, including objectives and expected results;
- Consider the appropriate mix of the various delivery models and approaches;
- Consider the alignment of service offerings and delivery approaches with the differing profiles and needs of various client types;
- Include a strategy to identify and prioritize the optimal locations for the delivery of in-person services; and,
- Consider the cost of services and value for money.

Promotion: Despite efforts to expand the availability of pre-arrival services by increasing the number of SPOs in 2015, the absence of an effective promotion strategy from IRCC affected the reach and impact of pre-arrival services. In addition, there are opportunities to actively inform or enroll prospective clients into pre-arrival services at an earlier stage.

Recommendation 2: IRCC should develop and implement a pre-arrival services promotion strategy to significantly increase awareness and uptake. This strategy should:

- Outline the key activities and guidance needed to improve awareness and increase program participation;
- Clarify the roles and responsibilities for IRCC (including Missions abroad) and SPOs with respect to promotion; and,
- Consider earlier opportunities for informing potential clients to help ensure they have sufficient time to access services.

Governance: The rapid expansion of partners and stakeholders, coupled with a lack of clarity related to roles and responsibilities made it difficult to ensure a coherent approach to management of pre-arrival services.

Recommendation 3: IRCC should clarify and strengthen its governance to lead and coordinate pre-arrival services by:

- Establishing clear roles and responsibilities among internal IRCC stakeholders, including across NHQ, regions and International Network; and,
- Clarifying the role of Missions in the delivery and monitoring of in-person pre-arrival services and SPOs.

Strengthening the Continuum of Settlement Services: While many pre-arrival SPOs have undertaken partnerships and established networks of cross-referrals on their own, there are opportunities for IRCC to take a stronger leadership role to ensure pre-arrival SPOs are connected to one another and to IRCC's domestic Settlement network, which would ensure more seamless pathways and efficient delivery for pre-arrival clients.

Recommendation 4: IRCC should establish a mechanism to promote collaboration, cross-referrals and sharing of best practices among pre-arrival SPOs and pre-arrival and domestic settlement SPOs.

Performance Measurement: A lack of standardized performance measurement tools and challenges in data collection have affected the ability of the Department to effectively report on pre-arrival services results in an in-depth manner and identify trends and address issues quickly, as they arise.

Recommendation 5: IRCC should strengthen performance measurement and reporting for pre-arrival services, by:

- Developing key indicators and data strategies to support collection of performance information; and,
- Considering developing a targeted Performance Information Profile for pre-arrival services which aligns with IRCC's Settlement Program and Resettlement Program Performance Information Profiles.